

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Rural Electrification Administration  
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HOW TO START OR IMPROVE NEWSLETTERS

WHY A CO-OP NEWSLETTER

1. To Build a Stronger Cooperative -- Good newsletters stimulate discussion about co-op affairs, create interest in the affairs and simultaneously build co-op spirit and loyalty.

2. To Aid Management -- By keeping members informed of co-op affairs, the co-op management stimulates member activities that often lighten the burden of management and even lower its costs. Announcements in newsletters also save time and eliminate the mailing of special letters, sometimes costing as much as a newsletter. A South Carolina co-op recently announced in its newsletter that a section of its line serving about 200 members would be out of service on a certain date at a certain time to permit maintenance work. Although about 50 members on this section of lines had telephones, not one call was made to the office inquiring as to what the trouble was. The newsletter announcement was effective. Work in the office, as well as in the field, went ahead uninterrupted. Newsletters reduce the number of late meter cards, provide a vehicle for power-use program.

3. To Permit Informed Business Decisions -- The cooperative is a business organization. It belongs exclusively to its members, and as owners of the business they are entitled to a regular monthly report on its operation. The newsletter has proved the best and most economical means of furnishing them with that report.

4. To Provide Information About Electric Farming. A co-op's job is only started when it makes electricity available to a farm. It is completed only when the farmer is making the most beneficial use of his electricity. The newsletter provides an economical and effective medium for disseminating power-use information. This is especially important to the entire Nation in a defense mobilization such as we have now. America needs more food than we have ever before produced, and electricity must make up for scarce manpower.

TYPES OF NEWSLETTERS

Three types of newsletter reproduction are generally used by cooperatives:

1. Offset Printing. This type is generally recommended by REA. REA recommends it because of its readability and because local pictures can be used at little added cost. Offset newsletters cost more than mimeographed newsletters when printed in quantities of less than 1,000, but printed in large quantities the cost is about the same or less. In nearly all cases, especially when three or four or more pictures are used, they cost less than ordinary printed letters.



2. Stencil Duplicating. This type (principal trade name is mimeograph) is the lowest in cost for small co-ops, but probably the least effective. Photographs cannot be used and the appearance of the publication is rarely very impressive and sometimes rather shoddy. They have little intrinsic appeal. Faulty reproduction often makes them unreadable.

3. Letter Press. For readability this type, which is ordinary printing, is superior, but it is the most expensive. The cost of engravings almost prohibits use of local pictures necessary for an attractive and effective publication.

#### SUGGESTED MATERIAL FOR NEWSLETTERS

Stories and features for a newsletter to carry regularly are:

1. At least one story, with local facts and figures, promoting whatever Electric Farming Campaign program the co-op has selected.
2. Report on the last meeting of the Board of Directors: Resolutions adopted, other business transacted, and problems discussed.
3. Manager's column of informal chat about current co-op affairs.
4. Cooperative monthly operating report, condensed to chief items and occupying not more than a quarter-column. This should include a statement of taxes paid. It may be desirable periodically to explain the meaning of some of the items in this report.
5. Report on construction progress: Work on new sections, improvements made on old sections, construction contracts, and right-of-way easements obtained, new REA loan applications filed, REA loan application approvals.
6. List of new members.
7. An appliance exchange or "trading post" column if members want it and if it does not jeopardize co-op relations with local newspapers.
8. A "mail bag" column for letters from readers, commenting on service, co-op policies, and co-op problems.
9. News notes about linemen and office personnel.
10. An honor roll of members who perform voluntary action of value to the co-op: Report outages, pull the truck out of the mud, report stopped meters, warn dangerous conditions, sign up new members, and so on.
11. List of the 10 top users of electricity and special mention of any newcomer to the top 10.



12. Report on major outages, their causes and correction. Also any other important maintenance developments.

13. A headline or "box" reminding members of the next meter reading date. (The use of a dog house list to discourage delinquent meter reading sometimes offends members and a list of those who do not pay their bills is not in good taste and of doubtful legality. An alternative might be an occasional story about the total amount of delinquent accounts, or the names of the first 10 to pay their bills. If a dog house works, it should be continued; if it does not, it should be dropped immediately. If it is used, it should identify repeaters.)

14. List of new equipment installed by specific members, or - better - a series of short narrative items containing this information.

15. At least one good local story, dealing with an unusual use of electricity on the co-op's lines, a rural industry made possible by co-op electric power, or other subject matter designed to promote the use of electricity by members. (This is related to the No. 1 suggestion under this heading but is not a substitute for it.) With offset printing, it is possible to illustrate this story with local photographs at little expense.

16. A list of the names and telephone number of maintenance men; also the names of directors and office personnel if space permits.

17. Some mention of the next annual meeting, even if it is eleven months away.

18. If you have a regular radio program, announce it in advance and summarize the last one, especially if it relates to your Electric Farming Campaign.

Stories and features for a newsletter to carry occasionally are:

1. Stories about seasonal installations, like pig and chick brooders, hay hoists, hay driers, barn fans and water warmers. A roundup story telling how many of these seasonal installations are in operation on the co-op lines is good copy when their value as a production device and their economy and simplicity of operation are explained by one or two or more farmers. These stories should tie in with the local program in the Electric Farming Campaign.

2. Sketches of directors, and office and maintenance personnel, illustrated by individual or group pictures. The purpose of these sketches is to acquaint members with employees. In items about directors, include a report on how they use electricity.



3. Articles containing news and comments on important anniversaries of the co-op and of REA -- anniversary of the co-op's incorporation, anniversary of energization and anniversary of REA (May, 1935). Such articles should carry comparative data as to number of members served, miles of line in operation and average power consumption.
4. Stories about the filing of applications for new REA loans, giving the amount, the number of members to be served, where they live, number of miles of lines to be constructed and the general use farmers in the area will make of their electricity.
5. Stories about the approval of applications for loans.
6. Stories publicizing the annual meeting; beginning with bare notices six to 12 months in advance; and stories reporting on it afterward. This is also given under the preceding heading of stories to carry regularly. We repeat it here to make sure you see it.
7. Articles giving safety information, like proper grounding of motors in damp places. Stories regarding unsafe conditions as reported by members make excellent copy. Stories about near accidents and methods of accident prevention are also effective.
8. Articles designed to orient new members. Some co-ops prefer to use a special letter addressed to new members only, but even old members are interested in knowing more about co-op principles, rules and regulations.
9. Stories about local schools, 4-H clubs and FFA clubs when their activities concern rural electrification and power uses.

#### TIPS FOR NEWSLETTER ITEMS

The more specific you make these farm and home stories, the better they will be. Editorial statements fill space, but do not have the effect and interest of experience stories. The best way to stimulate use of electricity on the farm is one farmer telling another.

#### Items from or about members:

1. Using unusual equipment, such as chicken debeakers, barn cleaners and hoists of various designs.
2. Using home-made equipment and appliances, such as pig and chick brooders, egg coolers, feed mixers, cement mixers and motor toters.
3. Adding to their farmstead wiring system to accommodate new equipment and appliances.



4. Buying new appliances.
5. Telling how electricity is appreciated (before-and-after contrast).

Items from or about members showing the use of electricity on the farm:

(Most of these should be related to the local program in the Electric Farming Campaign).

1. Produces more food for national abundance.
2. Increases income. Since obtaining co-op electricity many farmers have greatly increased their dairy, poultry and livestock operations. Others have augmented their income by addition of one or more of these enterprises.
3. Lowers operating costs by reducing labor needs.
4. Increases opportunity for farm specialization. In addition to dairy, poultry and livestock farming, farmers have specialized in the growing of sweet potatoes, using the hotbeds to culture plants. Others have specialized in the growing of vegetables and fruits on land irrigated with the aid of electric pumps.
5. Tends to keep young people on the farm by affording opportunities for steady incomes, modern living and elimination of many of the hardships of farm life.

6. Lengthens work hours of short winter days by providing light for the barn, barnyard machine shop and other buildings.

Items from and about members showing the use of electricity in the home:

(These, too, can often be related to the Electric Farming Campaign).

1. Eliminates drudgery, especially for the farm wife who uses modern appliances.
2. Provides new income, as by accumulating sales cream in a refrigerator, facilitating the preparation of farm products for sale, such as baked goods and poultry.
3. Brings new comforts.
4. Creates leisure hours for better living.
5. Makes for better health by providing the means to preserve food better and eliminate unsanitary conditions.



Items about specific rural industries on the co-op lines showing their importance in creating:--

1. New employment for rural people.
2. New wealth for rural communities.
3. Community growth and development

SOURCES OF NEWSLETTER STORIES, FEATURES AND ITEMS

1. The County Agent.
2. Standard operating reports and records.
3. Minutes of Board of Directors meetings.
4. Over-the-counter conversations when members drop in at the office. Try furnishing employees pads on which to jot down news items, and a central drawer or box to drop them in.
5. Comments at member meetings.
6. Telephone conversations with members when they call in about outages or for any other reasons.
7. Field and inspection trips.
8. "Remarks" space or any blank space on meter cards which may be used for consumer comment.
9. Information gathered by linemen.
10. Farmers who are among high users. Select a new name each month, write to ask what appliances and equipment he had, and publish the answer.
11. Appliance and farm equipment dealers and possibly wiring contractors.
12. Members who serve as neighborhood, school or club correspondents for the newsletter.
13. Request in the newsletter for letters and news items from members. This is more effective when tied to some specific item -- "Can you top this?"
14. Some school class or classes; perhaps they will provide items as a work project in English, journalism or civics.